

# Chapter 13

## International Schools and Global Citizenship Education



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**Abstract** This chapter defines the construct of the international school by pointing out the somewhat contradictory nature of its ideological and administrative purpose. In analyzing the troublesome construct of the international school, emphasis is placed on the relationship such schools tend to have with their local communities, showing there is a gap between discourse and practice. This opens the debate on the construct of global citizenship and global citizenship education (GCE). The two tensions that run through all of these different notions (international school, global citizenship, GCE) are, on the one hand, tension between local and global affiliations and, on the other, tension between a human rights rhetoric dedicated to sustainability and privileged cosmopolitan elitism. The chapter concludes with examples and suggestions of international school curricular directions that have the potential to unify the local with the global, thereby reducing the distance between mission and reality.

**Keywords** International school · Multiculturalism · Global citizenship

### Introduction

This chapter grapples with the tension between models of local citizenship and global citizenship through an analysis of the construct of the international school, something I explore critically. Part of this criticality consists of problematizing the identity of the international school. Indeed, depending on the lens one holds up to international schools, one might see not only sustainability, a celebration of diversity and mindfulness but likewise local action and respect for state citizenship.

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However, one might also see a seed bank for hyper-capitalistic neo-liberal world domination and rootless “third culture kid” cosmopolitanism, disdaining and overriding local institutions and efforts at citizenship. Thus, the chapter explains that the role of international schools in the vision for a just, peaceful and sustainable world is complex if not highly ambivalent. The chapter ends with some discussion of the implications of the idea of an education that transcends notions of “international” and looks more at competences and planetary challenges, very much in the vein of global citizenship education (GCE).

## The International School: A Problematic Construct

### *What Exactly Do We Mean by International Schools?*

As far back as 1962, seven different types of international school were recognized (Knight and Leach 1964) and since then, we could easily argue that there are even more models.<sup>1</sup> The operational structure of these schools ranges from private, for-profit (the majority) to state-funded.

There is an equally diverse (or sporadic, depending on how you wish to view the matter) number of accrediting agencies and international school organizations: the Alliance for International Education, the International Schools Association, the European Council of International Schools, the Council of International Schools, the International Baccalaureate and so on.

Efforts have been made to synthesize this into a manageable typology: Leach (1969) whittled it down to four points whereas Hayden and Thompson (2013) took it down to three. However, no one has been able to come up with a central, all-encompassing definition as definitions vary across authors and contexts. Walker has complained that it should be possible to define international schools but only does so tentatively himself:

An international school is an organization that offers its students an international education through the medium of its curriculum, its’ planned learning. An international curriculum is the thread that connects different types of international schools be they formally associated with the United Nations; be they state or privately funded, profit or not-for-profit; be they multicultural in terms of staff and students; be they located in the northern or southern hemisphere, housed in a medieval castle or on a concrete and plate-glass campus. And just as it is possible to describe the essential elements of a good scientific education, or a musical education or a holistic education or a Montessori education, so it must surely be possible to describe the essential elements of an international education (Walker 2015, p. 79)

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<sup>1</sup>Take for example, the United World Colleges Movement, British or American International Schools, United Nations International Schools, schools belonging to the International Schools Association, schools accredited by the Council of International Schools, International Baccalaureate Schools, bi-national or bilingual schools and so on.

More saliently, there is something of a fundamental rift that is not just a differentiating factor, it is a divisive factor, for International Schools can be viewed in two very different ways, in terms of their mission and their operational morphology.

The philosophy of most international schools is noble, driven by values and concerned with social impact. It is made up of the following assertions:

- That diversity is a strength;
- That the purpose of an education is for a better world;
- That education should be values-driven;
- That education should be holistic;
- That students should engage in community service;
- That students should be open-minded;
- That the mission of the International School is one of respect for differences.

This is echoed in Ian Hill's Utopian definition:

Emphasis should be laid in a basic attitude of respect for all human beings as persons, understanding of those things which unite us and an appreciation of the positive values of those things which may seem to divide us, with the objective of thinking free from fear or prejudice (Hill 2012, p. 11).

However, the operation of many, possibly most, international schools paints a rather different picture, namely that of:

- Private, for profit institutions sponsored by globalized industries, many with questionable ethical business practice;
- English medium schools for expatriates and wealthy locals who wish to live and sound like expatriates;
- Anglo-American dominated ghettos with little connection to the host country and separate, lower salaries for local hires with higher salaries for expatriate hires;
- Schools with unprecedented access to expensive resources, running at exorbitant fees and therefore incubators for a future cosmopolitan global elite, further compounding global inequity;
- Third culture kid generators, taking diverse populations of students and churning out future US or UK University graduates with little knowledge of their own histories and a distinct loss of their mother tongues.

This picture can be summarized by this not entirely positive definition by Tristan Bunnell: "elite-class reproducing institutions growing in demand as the English language has been impinging [...] on labor markets" (Bunnell 2014, p. 76).

Interestingly, Bunnell argues in this study that the trend is growing and that the original Utopian vision is being rapidly overtaken by the latter as we move from 70s idealism to twenty-first century neoliberalism. Indeed, International Schools are growing at a hefty pace and for pragmatic rather than idealistic reasons. A 2018 report indicated that a growth of 6% over the last 5 years left the world with over

9600 English medium international schools with huge growth in the United Arab Emirates (ICEF 2018). The report goes on to speculate that there will be 16,000 international schools across the globe in 2028, grossing a combined sector revenue of US\$95 billion. Interestingly,

Approximately 20% of [international school] students are the children of expatriate families who are seeking a school offering the language of learning and curriculum from their home country. However, the vast majority of international school students today are the children of local families choosing, what they consider to be, the best possible education close to home to prepare their child for university overseas and global careers (ICEF 2018, para. 11).

Another report speculates that there will be 7 million international school students worldwide by 2023 (Civinini 2019).

A world Education News & Reviews reports paper explains market drivers:

The internationalization of labor, the rapid growth of academic mobility at the higher education level, and the increasing dominance of English as the language of business have played perhaps the most significant roles in the growth of the international schools market (Clark 2014, para. 14).

And goes on to remind readers of socioeconomic parameters:

The other main driver of growth within the international schools market is ability to pay. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, top schools charge in excess of US\$25,000 a year, while the most expensive schools in the big Chinese metro markets top \$40,000 annually, essentially the same as what parents might expect to pay in tuition fees at top Western universities (Clark 2014, para. 16).

Importantly, the matter of not being able to produce a consistent definition of an international school is not just a problem of taxonomy, but a problem of ideology. What this dual carriage (expensive expat/wealthy islands on the one hand, education for a better world on the other) can create is a mish-mash of the two whereby highly privileged and entitled groups with accelerated global opportunities claim to be acting for world peace, for a better world and for interculturality. But are they?

To play devil's advocate (as I am not suggesting this is entirely true but more pointing out that it is something that can be perceived), one might view International School students and alumni as privileged armchair revolutionaries or "gauche caviar" (to use the rather splendid French idiom). One might view them as an entitled class of hyper-networked cosmopolitans who, as they progress from their international schools to top universities, will go on to earn several hundred times more than those at the bottom of the organizations they will invariably run.

To continue with this hypothesis, the disparaging onlooker might imagine these individuals flying business class around the world to attend conferences on sustainability and as they buy up companies as venture capitalists to sell them off at a whopping profit, using the skills they have gleaned through their schooling as they do so, white collar skills such as negotiation, confidence, networking, teamwork, etc. They would then send their children to international schools too.

On the surface, this would be because of the heart-warming values of tolerance, humanity and peace they would wish their children to embrace but deeper down, to perpetuate the global ivory tower, giving their children access to the privileged network of the socially enabled, allowing them in turn to float across the stratosphere that looks down on the wretched of the earth. As Bunnell says, this is a case of “elite class reproduction”. And after all, who can blame parents sending their children to school to offer them the best possible opportunities for social mobility.

The effect of this potential hypocrisy can be rather off-putting to say the least and helps one understand the less glamorous resentment of populists who look at international schools with scorn or those trapped in the modest dimensions of their nation states, people who toil the earth, work in rapidly disappearing factories or low-end functionaries being laid off due to globalization and singularity. How they must view such misty heights of the internationally educated “globetrotters” with headiness, with envy, perhaps with hatred. And who can blame them?

## **International Schools and the “Local Community”**

If there is a defining factor that cuts across this unfortunate dichotomy and unites the purpose and structure of international schools, it is possibly the relationship with the “local” culture. In Leach’s early definitional work, he sets out criteria for international schools and starts with the notion that “no one government nor national grouping should control the school [...], this particularly excluded the host nation” (1969, p. 10). The purpose of the international school is not so much to allow young people to be at home in the host country, but to “be at home in the world anywhere”. McKenzie has argued that among most International School teachers, there is very little “genuine or sustained contact with their ambient societies” (McKenzie 1998, p. 250). Cambridge and Thompson (2004) speak of “enclaves” whereas Pearce speaks of “cultural bubbles” (1994).

It should not surprise us that the overall intent and purpose of an international school is to be separate from the local national state system, which is why we are talking about international education and not national education. The most explicit expression of this notion is the “Overseas” school (as Leach puts it): in other words, a school for expatriates of one country operating in another (French, Dutch, American, British Schools in, say, China or Ghana etc.). These institutions explicitly turn away from the local culture to offer an education from somewhere else. This idea is reflected in the pay scheme of many international schools: a two-tiered system is common whereby expatriate hires receive higher salaries and better benefits than local hires (Cottrell 2015).

In more recent years there has been some effort to turn international school towards local interests. Mantras such as “think globally act locally” pepper a number of mission statements.

A random Internet search brings up statements in the same vein as these (I will not reference them for the aim here is not to single out institutions):

The combination of an international outlook and close ties to the local community empowers our students

Going on field trips or partnering with the local community

We will be establishing a Community Service program which will be of great benefit to the local community

Bunnell's (2005) paper looks the nature of international school involvement with "the local community" in some detail, to come to the conclusion, essentially, that degrees of engagement depend on factors of intent and leadership.

Without being gratuitously cynical, one does wonder if the terms "international community" and "local community" are not bandied about emptily in these statements. What exactly do we mean by local community after all? When is someone a member of the local community and the international community? Are we referring to expatriates versus local nationals, to local clubs and societies versus school clubs? Surely everyone is rooted in a local community and, in the twenty-first century, everyone is somehow connected to the international community?

Worse, the feeling that emanates from these statements, not intended but somehow palpable, is that the local community is the recipient of acts of charity, a backwater community still wallowing in the twentieth century who, if they are lucky, might expect a visit from the star-studded international jet set. One well-meaning website makes it quite clear what this relationship is, through its title: "Getting involved – how schools can help their local community" (Teacher Horizons 2019). Indeed, most International School websites speak of "serving" *the* "local community", *not that the* "local community" can consider, with caution, their expensive offering since it is somehow presented as a service.

And if the mission of an international school really is to prepare students for the "local community", then one would expect that this would mean explicit educational steps in that direction: courses in local history, local languages, local political systems. But if the curriculum is filled with this then surely these schools become national and where is the space left to deal with "international" culture, languages and history, whatever those might be? So, it is problematic and somewhat contradictory to suggest that international education's mandate is actually to prepare students for national settings.

Hence, we are left with another dichotomy straddling any possible cohesive definition, on the one hand the idea that an international school is resolutely turned to global matters: "international education programs and schools are ideally situated to prepare youth to make sense of the complexities of current world realities by studying globalization" (Myers 2010, p. 153). But on the other hand (although I would argue that this is more of a theoretical aspiration than one that actively materializes in International Schools), the idea that despite being called "international", international schools should focus on integrating students into so-called "local" culture: "in research in cross-cultural psychology, international education is largely understood as an 'adjustment' to host country norms and institutions, a notion that prioritizes social order and stability" (Marginson 2014, p. 6.).

## Global Citizenship

The philosophical underpinning of this tension between local and international is at the heart of another construct: global citizenship.

The philosophical debate about whether the role of education should be about reinforcing local, nation-state lines of identity or opening students to a more cosmopolitan world view goes back at least (though we could take it all the way back to Diogenes) to the so-called “*querelle du peuplier*” at the turn of the twentieth century in France. In 1897, Maurice Barrés, the popular French author, published “*Les Déracinés*” (“The Uprooted”) to much critical acclaim. He stated in this hymn to nationalism that remaining rooted in local culture was vital to the development of the self, culture and the nation. André Gide retorted in a lively fashion in a famous 1903 article where he suggested that, on the contrary, it was important to be mobile, to explore the world, or at least other regions of the same country and not to be trapped in a parochial straightjacket. The quarrel is called that of the “*peuplier*” because it evokes, as an analogy, the idea of a tree (a poplar in this case) being trained to grow in one direction or another and to what extent one might cut off branches and plant them elsewhere.

Hence it is something of a philosophical chestnut that has no right answer: whether it is better to remain in one’s community and culture or to expand experience into other areas remains open to debate and is a question that has been raised by most areas of the social sciences.

Like the idea of an international school, there is something of a taxonomical problem with the appellation global citizen. “No clear definition of global citizenship – or as otherwise referred to, cosmopolitan or world citizenship – have been concisely articulated” (Szelényi and Rhoads 2011, p. 22). This said, the various definitions of global citizenship are similar and point in roughly the same direction as the values-based philosophical missions of international schools: tolerance, peace, human rights, sustainability and some degree of responsibility for the planet.

Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013) define global citizenship as “global awareness, caring, embracing cultural diversity, promoting social justice and sustainability, and a sense of responsibility to act” (p. 858). Detailed reviews of the various definitions of global citizenship include those by Goren and Yemini (2017), whereas Veugelers (2011) points out the various types of global citizenship that we might consider (open, moral and political).

Oxfam (2006), leaning even more in the direction of social justice, describes a global citizen as someone who:

- Is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen;
- Respects and values diversity;
- Has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially, culturally, technologically and environmentally;
- Is outraged by social injustice;
- Participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from local to global;

- Is willing to act to make the world a more sustainable place;
- Takes responsibility for their actions (p. 3).

One might critique some of the elements of global citizenship, mainly the idea that we are rooted less in one nation or one place and are somehow more connected to the entire planet, as an unrealistic position. One can be a citizen of a country but it is impossible to be a citizen of the world as Arendt (1951) pointed out in numerous writings. She also expressed the subtle position that supranational sentiments leave something curiously unattainable and vacuous in their trail:

The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships—except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human (Arendt 1951, p. 299).

Thus, universal principles that operate at a macro-level run the risk of speaking to everyone and no one. The human condition becomes generic, bland, colorless and perhaps even meaningless. This opposed to the sharper contours of nation state identity where people are united (and indeed divided) by language, history, along with civil and fiscal responsibilities. A strong advocate of this line of thinking is Tate (2017) who points out just how feckless and decadent globalized identity can be in the adventurous and even polemical *Conservative Case for Education: Against the current*, Smith (2013b) describing her own experience as an international school student, laments somewhat the feeling of rootlessness that can come with multiple identities but no central identifier:

*Students* like me are uniquely rootless; we don't belong anywhere and we can't describe ourselves as any one thing. Some find that they make their home wherever their family is. Some just accept the inherent loneliness that comes with the lack of concrete ties to any single place (para. 4).

Torres (2017) argues that global citizenship is co-extensive with national citizenship and that essentially it adds value: we need not see the two as dichotomous. One is a local, national citizen with rights, responsibilities and allegiances at that level but, at the same time, one is preoccupied with the welfare of the planet as a whole, another way of saying act locally but think globally. To come back to the image of the “peuplier” or poplar, perhaps we could say that the image is misleading as human beings are not trees with roots that do not allow for growth elsewhere: we travel and can keep our roots unlike the shoot of a tree that grows entirely new roots.

## Global Citizenship Education

GCE is preoccupied with equipping students with the knowledge, tools and attitudes needed to address planetary phenomena while still respecting their national identity. Emanating from the United Nations' 2012 Global Education



First Initiative, UNESCO defines the construct of GCE as a tool to create a better world:

Global Citizenship Education aims to empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies (UNESCO 2018, para. 1).

UNESCO goes on to explain that GCE is based on three domains of learning:

- Cognitive: knowledge and thinking skills necessary to better understand the world and its complexities.
- Socio-emotional: values, attitudes and social skills that enable learners to develop affectively, psychosocially, and physically and to enable them to live together with others respectfully and peacefully.
- Behavioral: conduct, performance, practical application and engagement (UNESCO 2018, para. 2).

Clearly, the tenets of GCE go back to the earlier mission-driven vision of what an international school should be. In fact, the notions of sustainability and social justice, even more humanitarian in flavor, feature more forcefully in definitions of GCE than they do in early definitions of international schools.

Indeed, one finds some resonance of GCE in the goals of the International Baccalaureate:

- Developing citizens of the world in relation to culture, language and learning to live together
- Building and reinforcing students' sense of identity and cultural awareness
- Fostering students' recognition and development of universal human values
- Stimulating curiosity and inquiry in order to foster a spirit of discovery and enjoyment of learning
- Equipping students with the skills to learn and acquire knowledge, individually or collaboratively, and to apply these skills and knowledge accordingly across a broad range of areas
- Providing international content while responding to local requirements and interests
- Encouraging diversity and flexibility in teaching methods
- Providing appropriate forms of assessment and international benchmarking (IB 2012, para. 2).

Some International Schools promote the concept of global citizenship explicitly, for example Yokohama International School (one of the world's first international schools) offers a "global citizen diploma" with an emphasis on "communications, global perspectives and community engagement" so as to "provide them with the academic and social skills that will enable them to fulfill their human potential as responsible global citizens" (Yokohama International School 2019, para. 3).

Sotogrande International school runs a Global Citizenship Program based on four pillars: global mindedness; social entrepreneurship; service learning; environmental sustainability (Sotogrande International School 2019).

How does this philosophical definition of GCE, much aligned to the thinking behind the mission of international schools, play out against the socioeconomic operationalization of these ideas in global organizations? In other words, might we be facing a similar dilemma to that of international schools where on the one hand we talk about issues of social justice but on the other perhaps perpetuate global wealth disparity? As Torres (2017) points out, “Global citizenship education should play a major role in challenging neoliberalism, but as any other concept, it could become a sliding signifier, and hence it could be co-opted and implemented following a neoliberal rationality” (para. 24).

The term “global citizen” enjoys some currency outside the well-meaning halls of non-governmental institutions and international schools to describe citizen-by-investment schemes called “global citizenship” (PWM 2019), meaning that in some countries, if a person is wealthy enough, (s)he can buy citizenship. There is also, of course, the connotation of the word “global” with the construct of “globalization”, which resonates with the neoliberal practices of off-shoring, capitalist mergers and outsourcing that are not exactly in line with the humanitarian aspirations of GCE.

Given the socio-economic level of their students, are international schools more in line with the OECD’s concept of “global competency” rather than “global citizenship”? Global competence is described more as an attitude or approach with a general praxis around sustainability than an active act of citizenry that implies legislative and political parameters:

Global competence is the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development. (OECD 2018, para. 1)

Therefore, one might argue that this ideology suits better the profile of the international student as opposed to the more politically engaged idea of global citizenship.

## Conclusion

What I have explored in this chapter is two constructs: international schooling on the one hand and global citizenship on the other.

I have argued that the international school is a troublesome construct for three main reasons:

1. It is difficult to actually know or define what we mean by “international school”.
2. Definitional problems are more than semantic because of two diametrically opposed notions: education for world peace, respect and equality on the one hand and education for a global clique of the elite class on the other. It could be argued that these centrifugal forces indicate a certain ideological hypocrisy.

3. The relationship that international schools tend to have with the nation states in which they operate is superficial and perhaps even disingenuous: many international schools claim to be part of the “local community” (and I’ve suggested that this is a slightly disparaging term) but what exactly that means, outside of charitable acts towards neighborhood social endeavors, is difficult to fathom.

Global citizenship also suffers from definitional fuzziness but is more coherent as a notion than international school. In essence, it means that the social consciousness of students should be geared towards sustainability, justice and peace. Although a strict dichotomy between the global and local citizen was suggested by philosophers such as Barrés and Arendt, (admittedly before the idea of global citizenship had been coined in its modern iteration), one can, through time, be both and adhere to nation state citizenship and have a broader global social impact.

While some international schools refer to GCE explicitly in their mission statements, I would suggest that the tenets of GCE should be brought to the fore of all international schools and national schools in order to reinforce the early ideals of international education and express a clear purpose for schools across the planet to look at global problems squarely and boldly with sensitivity to all of the issues evoked in the United Nation’s 2030 Sustainability Goals.

In my work on global challenges for the twenty-first century (Hughes 2018), I suggest seven areas that all schools should tackle, irrespective of their status and mission. They are: mindfulness, singularity, sustainability, terrorism, post-truth politics, knowledge and character. These are planetary issues that are felt at local levels and need to feature in educational programs. Schools can look to the work of UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education to develop future-proof, life worthy global competences that can operate in any school for individual, collective and public good. They are: lifelong learning, self-agency, interacting with others, interacting with the world, interactively using diverse tools and resources, multi-literateness and trans-disciplinarity (Marope et al. 2018). These to me are clear examples of GCE.

In the end, we should look beyond the term “international” to aim for an education that is relevant and holistic. GCE, international schools and any learning environment should operate at micro and macro levels, through individuals, local environments and beyond.

However, to come back to the image of the poplar tree and to reflect upon the relationship between the seed and the tree, let us not forget that these broad, sweeping agendas operating at “global”, “international”, “world”, “supranational” and even “national” or “community” abstractions should not forsake one of the most powerful forces an education can muster: that which operates in the individual. It is from that genesis that collective impact will come, through thoughts, values and action. The German philosopher Wilhelm Von Humboldt puts it poignantly:

Now, whatever man receives externally is only like the seed. It is his own active energy alone that can turn the most promising seed into a full and precious blessing for himself. It is beneficial only to the extent that it is full of vital power and essentially individual.

The highest ideal, therefore, of the co-existence of human beings seems to me to consist in a union in which each strives to develop himself from his own innermost nature, and for his own sake. ... [T]he exertions of such spontaneous agents succeed in exciting the highest energies. (Van Humboldt n.d., cited by Smith 2013a, para. 22)

In the specific contexts of international schools, a concrete project that has been implemented to drive the big idea behind this quotation and, in many ways, the overarching notion of GCE, is the International School of Geneva's Universal Learning Program (ULP) (Ecolint 2019), a school program that focuses on developing character, passion, mastery and collaboration with competence-related assessment. The ultimate aim of the program is to lead to greater social impact on individual, collective and public platforms. It is an educational model that envisages the outcome of education and not just the constituent elements or immediately academic, scholarly outputs that schools tend to emphasize.

By developing a number of salient competences such as accountability, responsibility, balancing freedoms with respect, responsible consumption, global awareness and environmental custodianship, the ULP develops approaches from the inner moral core of each student to lead them to socially responsible actions. Every ULP student must engage in service learning and therefore shows a level of accountability to local and social parameters that further drives the mission of GCE.

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